

# “That’s All You Really Are”: Centering Identities without Essentialist Belief

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## 1. Introduction

Members of marginalized groups often find themselves treated as if they are “just” tokens of those groups: as “nothing more” than a woman, a black person, a homosexual, a Muslim, a wheelchair-user, etc. Correlatively, people who are not members of those groups often find those identities “popping out” in their intuitive thinking about and interactions with those individuals, sometimes despite their best efforts. Centering social identity in this way can be deeply pernicious, by leading us to regulate our thinking and behavior in accordance with entrenched stereotypes. For example, people are more likely to interpret a black man reaching into his pocket as reaching for a gun rather than a wallet (Correll et al. 2002, Eberhardt et al. 2004, Payne 2001); or to sit further away from a black woman than a white one (Amodio & Devine 2006, Nosek et al. 2007). These identity-based expectations and reactions render us complicit in enforcing social norms and boundaries in both overt and subtle ways, ranging from disgust and avoidance to hate crimes, structural oppression, and genocide.

Not every case of identity-centric thinking is pernicious: among other things, it can play a key role in self-construction and in progressive politics. Nor do all of the pernicious effects of identitarianism arise from our minds: social identities are implemented in and perpetuated by institutional and material structures that extend beyond any individual’s psychology. But psychology is undeniably a central factor in understanding and ameliorating these effects.

At the same time, it is not obvious that an illuminating account of the mental states and processes underlying identity-centric cognition and action is possible, because identity-centric thinking appears to be highly heterogeneous. Most obviously, it covers a wide range of identity categories, with widely varying social, material, and cognitive significances. But an agent can also center any given identity in a variety of ways, ranging from explicitly endorsing a given identity’s causal centrality on the basis of a developed theory to feeling moved by inchoate, merely implicit and unwanted affective responses. Third, one can center identity through a range of modalities, including perceptual salience, conceptual stereotypes, and emotional and aesthetic reactions. Finally, identity-centric cognition seems on introspection to be underwritten by very different mechanisms, including imagistic imagination, inferential deliberation, and unconscious association.

We will argue that this diverse range of contents, states, and processes can be subsumed under a unified explanation, if we appeal to *frames*, or representations with the function of guiding intuitive interpretation. More specifically, we propose:

**The Frame View:** An agent’s patterns of identity-centric thought and action are explained by their identity-centric frames (in marginal cases, perspectives) about the relevant social group, in ways that cannot be reduced to belief or other propositional attitudes toward their contents.

Briefly, a frame is a representational vehicle (e.g., a sentence, picture, or symbol) that expresses a focal interpretive principle which organizes an agent’s overall thinking about a topic by encapsulating a

perspective on it (Camp 2019a). Perspectives, in turn, are open-ended dispositions to notice, respond, and evaluate (Camp 2013, 2014, 2019b). The Frame View thus holds that patterns of identity-centric thought and action are explained by an agent's tendency to interpret others in a way that focalizes the relevant identity, where this tendency is typically anchored in representations of that identity. Such representations can take a variety of forms, including generics ("Boys will be boys"), slurs and other derogatory terms ("fag," "slut"), slogans ("Trump that Bitch," 2016), memes (Pepe the frog), and visual tropes (Barbie dolls).

The Frame View is a non-intellectualist view. While believed contents can encapsulate and guide interpretation in an open-ended intuitive way, not all frames are believed. And even for those that are, the characteristic function of belief doesn't adequately explain their cognitive role as frames. Identity-centric thought and action result, not primarily from endorsing the ascription of a property to an individual or group, but rather from regulating attention and interpretation in terms of a social identity. By distinguishing frames and perspectives from beliefs, the Frame View captures a disparate range of cases of identity-centric thought and action in a unified, well-motivated way.

We proceed as follows. In §2, we describe the cognitive phenomena involved in centering social identities in thought and action. In §3, we articulate the Frame View. In §4, we argue that it can explain the emergence of full-fledged essentialist theories out of inchoate, merely implicit identity-centric thinking, and that it provides a theoretical basis for a range of non-intellectualist interventions on pernicious forms of identitarianism.

## 2. Centering Social Identities in Thought and Action

In this section, we outline our target of explanation: identity-centric thought and action. For expositional clarity, we focus on traditional gender categories ("woman" and "man"), though part of our ultimate point is that different social categories are interpreted in very different ways.

Gender categories are highly *salient* across a wide variety of contexts: we notice gender immediately and involuntarily, and treat it as a basic fact about a person. This salience is reflected in gendered pronouns, which route the vast majority of our thought and talk through gender (Dembroff and Wodak 2018, forthcoming). It is displayed in the fact that many people find it unsettling to interact with people whose gender fails to conform to social norms or is not expressed clearly (Lopes 2019). More prosaically, it is manifested by gender reveal parties and the ubiquity of the question "Boy or a girl?" to expecting parents. Knowing someone's gender matters partly because we employ different patterns of behavior toward women and men, ranging from explicit, culturally conventionalized scripts, such as men paying for women's drinks or greeting with handshakes versus cheek kisses, to subtle, highly individual and contextual patterns, such as seating distance and amount and type of physical touch.

Thus, we can proceed more smoothly and confidently in our daily interactions if we can use gender to coordinate. More generally and less practically, we tend to *project* properties along gender lines: we expect women to share important properties with other women that they don't share with men, and vice versa. That is, gender functions cognitively as a category for induction via complex, socially shared gender stereotypes, which often find expression in generics like "women are submissive/caring/emotional" or "men are assertive/cool-headed/rational." In addition to their rich descriptive imputations, these stereotypes often have a normative dimension: they don't just capture

what we think women and men are in fact like, but how they ought to be (Knobe et al. 2013, Leslie 2015, Newman and Knobe 2019).

On the descriptive side, stereotypical properties play a pervasive role in social interpretation. The behaviors we observe don't wear their causes, or which traits they express, on their sleeves; stereotypes guide our interpretation of the particular token acts and events we encounter, influencing which categories we subsume them under and thus what other past, present, and future properties we expect. Thus, the same request for a raise is likely to be described as aggressive in a woman but assertive in a man; rejecting flirtation is likely to be perceived as an invitation to further pursuit in a woman but as disinterest in a man; and socially coerced cooperative behavior, such as shouldering service roles at work, is likely to be interpreted as originating out of a caring, sensitive nature in a woman but as the result of external pressure or prudential motivation in a man.

On the normative side, we have a clear intuitive sense of appropriate behavior for women and men, ranging from superficial features like what to wear and how to sit, walk, and inflect one's voice, to more fundamental features like how to structure one's career, relationships, and sexual life. For many, violations of these norms are jarring. In some, they provoke moral criticism and intense emotions, such as anger and contempt. They also often also provoke strong, normatively-tinged aesthetic responses: for example, women's voices sound shrill and annoying; or body hair on women seems crude and disgusting. These moral, emotional, and aesthetic responses are often immediate and automatic, in a way that makes them appear obvious and natural. While this is especially true for those who endorse the stereotype, even agents who disavow the generating stereotype's normative appropriateness may still feel uncomfortable around norm-violators, in a way that may lead them to seek alternative justifications for those feelings.

To center gender, it isn't necessary to attend to gender above all other categorical features in every situation, or to project all of an individual's unobserved features in terms of gender; one just needs to find gender somewhat salient, project some range of features on its basis, and behave differently toward individuals as a result. That is, people differ in how much, and how, they center gender. While in the extreme case, womanhood is treated as an all-encompassing, rigid category regulating every aspect of a woman's life, nearly everyone centers gender to some extent, even if only begrudgingly.

While gender provides a particularly clear example of identity-centric thought and action, we also center other broad identity categories, including race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status; as well as more specific identities such as mother, professor, and athlete. Summarizing and generalizing, we can now say that the following are characteristic of a subject S whose patterns of thought about and action regarding a group G are G-centric:

- **Salience:** S finds G-membership highly salient.
- **Stereotypical Thinking:** S employs a stereotype for what Gs are like.
- **Induction:** S expects individual Gs to share properties possessed by previously encountered Gs.
- **Action Interpretation:** S interprets the behavior of individual Gs by appeal to G-stereotypical features.
- **Normative Judgment:** S is disposed to criticize Gs for failing to conform to norms for stereotypical Gs, and to offer behavioral prescriptions based on G-membership.
- **Emotional Reaction:** S experiences negative emotional reactions to Gs who do not conform to the stereotype, and positive emotional reactions to Gs who do.
- **Aesthetic Reaction:** S's aesthetic responses and evaluations are guided by the target's being G.

- **Patterned Interaction:** S interacts with Gs and non-Gs in distinctive ways.

We take these eight features together to offer a theoretically perspicuous but relatively uncontroversial description of the most important elements of an otherwise familiar phenomenon of identity-centric thought and action. Our central question is: what is the psychological basis for these patterns of thought and action? What kinds of mental states, processes, and dispositions underlie and explain them?

### 3. The Frame View

Given that identity-centric thought and action encompasses such a wide class of thoughts and behaviors, one might think that it can have no explanatorily unified psychological basis. Instead, explanations will be heterogeneous and piecemeal: this behavior is explained by the agent's endorsed beliefs and deliberations, that one by implicit bias, the other by a primed image, and so on.

In our view, such pessimism is unwarranted. While it is true that identity-centric thought and action are produced by a wide and diverse range of mental states, processes, and dispositions, these are all typically regulated by *frames*: representational devices with the function of guiding an agent's perspective on, or intuitive interpretation of, some aspect of the world. In this section, we lay out what frames and perspectives are and how they allow us to explain identity-centric thought and action.

To see the powerful role that frames can play in orienting our thinking in general, consider mantras like "What would Jesus do?" or "It's the economy, stupid." These sayings guide interpretation of an open-ended and otherwise disparate range of situations, highlighting those features that conform to the principles they express, imposing a certain set of values on them, and suggesting certain courses of action. Similar effects are produced by identity-centric frames. For example, "Boys will be boys" expresses a perspective on masculinity that disposes us to interpret a range of aggressive and transgressive behaviors by boys and men as natural, exuberant, and playful.

How strongly this frame disposes you to construe behavior in this way and which behaviors it disposes you to interpret will depend, among other factors, on whether you endorse the frame, on how reflective you are about it, and on how deeply embedded you are within sexist culture. We return to these points in §4. Insofar as the slogan functions as a frame, however, and you are a member of the dominant culture in which it circulates, it will affect your intuitive perspective on male behavior to some degree, however subtly and fleetingly. *Inter alia*, it will render you more inclined to characterize particular behaviors you encounter in positive or at least exculpatory terms, to highlight endearingly boyish features of males, to link them together as originating from a common source, and to empathize with male motivations. At the limit, you might end up characterizing Brock Turner, who raped an unconscious woman behind a dumpster at a fraternity party, as "happy go lucky...with an easy-going personality and a welcoming smile," and experiencing outrage at the severity of the justice system for condemning a young man for "20 minutes of action."<sup>1</sup>

Thinking of the slogan "Boys will be boys" as a frame or interpretation-orienting device explains its cognitive power in regulating thought, feeling, and action in a holistic, ongoing way, in a way that merely attributing the belief that boys will be boys to the agent cannot explain. The slogan's

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<sup>1</sup> These descriptions are from Brock Turner's father's letter, read out at his sentencing hearing. See: <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2016/06/08/the-full-letter-read-by-brock-turners-father-at-his-sentencing-hearing/>

semantically encoded propositional content is nearly tautologous, and inferences from it are poor candidates for producing the rich affect-laden characterizations and emotional responses just discussed; nor is there any obvious, stable, determinate propositional content that might be pragmatically associated with the slogan to explain the various effects it generates across a diversity of contexts.

This is, of course, just one example. To establish the Frame View, we need to show that identity-centric thought and action in general are explained by frames and perspectives. In §3.1, we discuss the cognitive role of frames and perspectives in a bit more detail, showing that they are ubiquitous in our thinking and that they powerfully shape our behavior, especially the sorts of behavior most strongly associated with identity-centric thought and action, and that they cannot be reduced to beliefs. In §3.2, we show how frames and perspectives can accommodate and explain the wide variety of forms of identity-centric thought and action presented in §2.

### 3.1. The Function of Frames

Let's start with a definition: frames are representations that function to express a focal interpretive principle which organizes an agent's overall thinking about a topic. We individuate frames functionally: what makes a given representation both a frame at all, and the particular frame it is, is what it does: guide interpretation in an open-ended, intuitive way by regulating what you notice, how you classify it, what you project from it, and how you evaluate and respond to it. Any representation that guides interpretation in this overall way for a subject in a context is a frame; and multiple token representations, or the same representation employed by distinct agents or the same agent at distinct times, count as the same frame to the extent that they function to generate the same profile of noticing, classifying, projecting, evaluating, and responding.

An important part of what we mean by saying that a frame is an intuitive interpretive principle is that it actually guides attention, classification, projection, and response in a largely automatic way. In this sense, we can say that a frame is an actually implemented rule for interpretation; and this in turn helps clarify the relationship between frames and beliefs. In general, implemented rules need not be believed; indeed, they cannot all be, on pain of regress (Carroll 1895). More specifically, while it is true that beliefs often guide intuitive interpretation, frames cannot simply be analyzed as beliefs.

On the one hand, not all frames have the right sort of content to be believed. Many frames, like "Think globally, act locally," are imperatival, and thus plausibly express a content that is something more like a hyperplan (Starr 2020) or an ordered To Do (Portner 2004) list than a propositional cut in the space of possibilities. Some, such as the iconic 1989 photograph of 'Tank Man' in Tiananmen Square, have a content that is only propositional given a more specific understanding of propositionality (Camp 2019). Others, including memes such as Pepe the Frog, Notorious RBG, or Bridezilla; and tropes, such as Julia Roberts' 1990 "hooker with a heart of gold" role in *Pretty Woman*, lack any determinate content, propositional or not. And still others, including slogans like "#blessed" and dictums such as "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," are taken by their subjects to be aspirational, apt, ironic, or funny despite being literally false.

On the other hand, any representation, whether propositional or not, can function to guide interpretation in an open-ended, intuitive way without being believed or otherwise endorsed. Thus, the merely hypothetical assumption that there are innate differences in intelligence between racial groups

tends to affect your interactions with people from different racial groups. Likewise for asking yourself whether women were admitted to your graduate program just because of their gender, or imagining that a black man with a gun is walking behind you on your way home (Steele 2011). Rather than functioning primarily to determine *which* contents we represent to be true or as to-be-done, the cognitive role of frames is one of orienting attention, explanation, and evaluation in an intuitive, flexible, holistic way. While an agent's beliefs affect which frames they find intuitively compelling, and while the frames they employ affect which beliefs they form, neither functional role can be reduced to the other.

Because frames can be either propositional or non-propositional and engaged under a variety of modalities and attitudes, they can be invoked to explain a much wider range of behavior than beliefs and other propositional representations. But what does it mean to generate thought and behavior by guiding interpretation in an open-ended, intuitive way? Interpreting a topic is a matter of forming a *characterization* of it: an intuitive way of thinking about a subject which collects a complex body of information, often including vivid, affect-laden features, into a holistic multidimensional structure (Camp 2015, 2019). We form characterizations of many types of objects: groups (e.g. Americans, quarterbacks), places (e.g. the New York subway, Paris), individuals (e.g. family members; Donald Trump, Notre Dame), particular events (e.g. the hike where I got bitten by a snake, our wedding), periods of our lives (e.g. high school), historical periods (e.g. the Great Depression), and so on.

Stereotypes, as culturally entrenched characterizations, are the most familiar case.<sup>2</sup> For example, many people outside of the United States share a stereotype of Americans as, among other things, beefy and tall; constantly wearing sneakers and workout clothes; speaking loudly and with gratingly open vowels; largely oblivious to their surroundings but highly impressed by anything over 200 years old; gulping down burgers, large sodas, and frozen ready-made meals, often in front of a TV; and endorsing individualistic, libertarian or quasi-libertarian politics.

This stereotype illustrates the aspects of characterizations mentioned above. A stereotype of Americans isn't just a list of attributed properties. Many of its constituent features, like having a grating accent, are experientially vivid and affect-laden. Some, like having a distinctive accent, are more prominent than others, in being more initially noticeable and available for recall. Some are treated as more explanatorily central: for instance, individualism may explain eating frozen meals in front of the TV, instead of lingering over raucous family meals. These dimensions of prominence and explanatory centrality are independent: for instance, individualism is not particularly noticeable but is highly explanatory, and sneaker-wearing is noticeable but not highly explanatory. At the same time, the dimensions interact: we tend to seek to explain highly prominent features via highly central ones, and our attention is often drawn to features we take to be highly explanatory.

Finally, although we can, at least in principle, specify the content of any given characterization in propositional terms, it is neither necessary nor sufficient for characterizing a topic in that way that one explicitly entertain those propositions. The issue is not just that most characterizations' contents are tacit and amorphous. Rather, the point is that characterizations require actual cognitive implementation, in an intuitive way that is partly but not entirely under voluntary control. Thus, it's not enough to characterize Americans according to the stereotype that one explicitly entertain or even accept the claims "Americans have a grating accent," "Americans are loud and boorish," and/or

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<sup>2</sup> Note that we are using 'stereotype of X' to refer to one's full stereotype for Xs; in other uses of the term 'stereotype' (e.g. XXXX), specific generics (e.g. "Americans are loud") count as stereotypes. We take these to be aspects of stereotypes rather than full stereotypes.

“Americans like to go it alone”; rather, one must actually hear Americans’ accents as grating, notice their sneaker- and sweat-wearing, and explain their particular behaviors by appeal to individualist libertarianism. Just as there is a functional difference between merely cognizing and actually implementing a Gestalt structure in one’s perceptual experience, so can there be a functional difference between believing that women deserve equal pay for equal work and implementing that belief in one’s intuitive interpretations and assessments of otherwise equivalent behaviors by men and women. And just as an agent encountering a common scene before and after a Gestalt switch “sees that it has not changed, and yet sees it differently” (Wittgenstein 1953), so too can a perspectival shift make a functional difference to an agent’s characterizations even in the absence of any narrowly informational difference, insofar as the agent notices different features, classifies the same feature in different terms and explains it on different grounds, and responds to it with a different valence.

Characterizations are rich, multidimensional construals of particular topics. Some frames, like ‘Cheeto Jesus’ or ‘Bridezilla’, function to guide interpretation of a fairly specific topic in a fairly constrained, stable, and substantive way. But in general, characterizations are not isolated, static mental constructs; rather, they arise and evolve dynamically, often in tandem, as an agent’s informational and practical context changes. A *perspective* is an open-ended disposition to interpret (parts of) the world: that is, to notice, relate, and respond the world in certain ways, by forming and updating characterizations of a range of relevant subjects. More specifically, we analyze perspectives as clustered dispositions to attend to certain kinds of information; to explain information by centering certain factors and grounds of connection; and to evaluate features and situations in certain practical, moral, aesthetic, and emotional terms (Camp 2017, 2019b). We’ll briefly canvass each of these three aspects.

First, *attention* parses lower-level features into repeatable categories relative to a presupposed taxonomy: for example, the non-US-residents’ perspective on Americans parses utterances’ phonological patterns into various accent categories. Attention also selects among assigns differential degrees of prominence to parsed features (Tversky 1977): for example, it selects open vowels as a highly prominent feature, but not the realization of coronal fricatives (very roughly, the distinction between ‘s’ and ‘sh’ or ‘th’, which is highly prominent for differentiating dialects of Spanish).

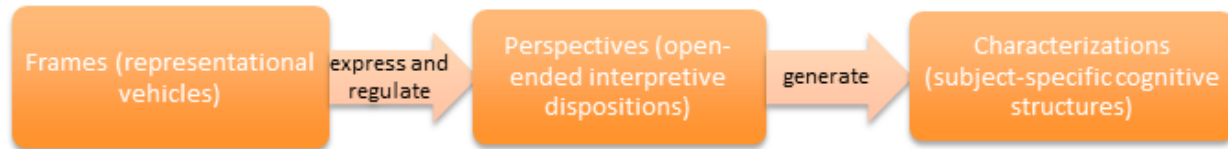
Second, *explanation* connects parsed features into networks of centrality (Thagard 1989, Sloman et al 1998): some constituent features are more closely and richly linked in to the network of the resulting characterizations than others. For example, the non-US-residents’ perspective on Americans invoked above might center individualistic libertarianism as a key factor in explaining many different features of Americans’ behavior in general, and the specific behavior of specific Americans. In general, networks of explanation track different kinds of relations among features, including causation, correlation, and material implication; as well as moral, aesthetic, and or otherwise normative justification; with different perspectives employing different explanatory principles and priorities among these various kinds of relations.

Finally, *evaluation* responds to attributed constituent features and overall topics in ways that are appropriate given the agent’s presupposed categories, values and priorities. For example, the non-US-residents’ perspective on Americans might include more general dispositions to construe individualism as selfish and myopic, and to value subtlety, restraint, and complexity over straightforward, explicit representation and communication.

Putting these components together: agents have open-ended, clustered dispositions to interpret the world in certain ways (*perspectives*). Exercising those dispositions generates *characterizations*: rich,



implemented, multi-dimensional, holistic, experience- and affect-laden representations of specific subjects. Most perspectives and characterizations are inchoate, interpersonally variable, and contextually shifty. *Frames* are representations with the function of expressing a focal interpretive principle which organizes an agent's or agents' overall thinking about a topic or range of topics, by crystallizing a perspective into a coherent, stable, and easily shareable form. In diagrammatic form:



Frames are potent tools for guiding intuitive interpretation. Among other things, we deploy them to regulate our own individual thinking (e.g. “He’s just not that into you”), to guide sustained projects of joint inquiry (e.g. “Minds are computers”), to broadcast our basic commitments and enlist others in allegiance (e.g. “Black Lives Matter,” the Pride flag, the Thin Blue Line flag), to communicate complex bodies of new information in compact form (e.g. “Our department chair is a bulldozer/mouse”), and to praise and demean (e.g. “He’s a hero/snowflake/boomer”).<sup>3</sup>

Frames’ cognitive potency in regulating attention, explanation, and response at an intuitive level extends their reach well beyond the scope of intentional, collaborative investigation and interpretation. Agents regularly impose frames on others who are resistant to them, whether directly, for instance by hurling slurs (“You S!”) directly at targets; or indirectly, for instance by injecting perspective-laden metaphors and thick terms into conversation (e.g. “Even George, that tailwagging lapdog of privilege, agreed that it was unjust.”) Part of the infuriating power of such frames is their ability to affect our thought, imagination, and behavior in ways we actively reject, at a level beneath that of personal, voluntary control (Moran 1989, Steele 2011, Camp 2013, 2018).

Given this (brief) account of what frames are and how they fit into our cognitive economies in general, what should we say about identity-centric thought in particular? The Frame View holds that identity-centric thought and action is unified as an explanatory class in virtue of being underwritten by identity-centric frames, and in marginal cases by frameless perspectives. In our view, a frame is identity-centric if the characterizations it generates are ones that reliably center a socially relevant kind. More specifically, an identity-centric frame tends to generate

- (a) characterizations of a relevant social group  $G$  which impute a high degree of stability, cohesion, and uniformity among the features attributed to individuals within the group; and
- (b) characterizations of individual  $G$ s on which  $G$ -membership is highly central to many of those individuals’ further features (where centrality may be material, causal/explanatory and/or normative).

Employing an identity-centric frame does not require having higher-order, propositional beliefs about the stability of  $G$  as a kind or about the centrality of  $G$  to the further features of individual  $G$ s. Rather, agents who employ identity-centric frames may simply be disposed to interpret people in terms

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<sup>3</sup> For more on frames in scientific inquiry, see Camp 2019a. For more on metaphors as frames, see Camp 2006, 2018. For more on slurs as frames, see Camp 2013.



of  $G$ -membership. These dispositions can make a functional difference in how an agent experiences, attends to, and explains the relevant portion of the world, without necessarily being explicitly encoded as such, or even affecting what they take to be actually true about it.

We can now see clearly why identity-centric frames are well-poised to explain the diverse range of ways of thinking and acting outlined in §2. Given that identity-centric frames often, even typically lead to tokening culturally shared stereotypes for  $G$ s, such frames secure *stereotypical thinking*. Given that the resulting characterizations tend to impute high stability, cohesion, and uniformity to the represented categories, we expect to find robust *induction* via  $G$ . Employing such a frame will also lead to characterizing individual  $G$ s in a way that centers membership in  $G$ , first by rendering membership in  $G$  highly salient in thinking about those individuals; second by parsing particular features of those individuals in  $G$ -congruent terms; and third, by connecting and explaining many features of individual  $G$ s to their being  $G$ . And when the features attributed to those individuals are actions, such frames will generate *action interpretation*.

Further, as we saw above, the connections among features that are a characterization imputes need not be causal or even explanatory, but can track moral or aesthetic justification. As a result, characterizations resulting from identity-centric frames often impute *affective* and *normatively-laden* features, in an engaged intuitive way that prompts visceral response. Finally, by parsing and evaluating a host of constituent features of multiple individuals in terms of their membership in  $G$ , while not interpreting other individuals in those terms, identity-centric frames induce *patterned interaction* with members and non-members.

In sum, in this section we have argued that because frames express open-ended perspectives, which in turn generate intuitive characterizations, they orient our thinking and action in powerful and pervasive ways. Frames focusing on social identity are especially powerful, because they treat a simple categorical feature of social kind membership as taxonomically straightforward, highly salient, explanatorily central, and affectively and evaluatively laden, in ways that are primed to regulate countless small interpretive and behavioral interactions with the people we encounter on a daily basis.

### 3.2. Frames and Perspectives Capture Degrees and Kinds of Identity-Centric Thought and Action

A good model of identity-centric thought and action should explain not only why the diverse manifestations of identity-centrism discussed in §2 form a unified explanatory kind, but also why particular agents manifest the particular patterns they do, and why different agents manifest different patterns when they do. We claim that the Frame View is well-placed to satisfy these desiderata as well. In this section, we outline the type of frame most likely to generate patterns of identity-centric thought and action that score highly on the six dimensions identified in §2. We then show how variations in types of frame can explain variations in behavior, concluding with the limit case of identity-centric thought and action that lack a corresponding frame.

In the paradigm case of identity-centric thought and action, an agent centers identity in all of their thinking about the relevant social kind  $G$ , about individual members of  $G$ , and about otherwise associated people and topics, at both an intuitive and a reflective level, across a wide range of contexts. Such an agent scores highly on all the dimensions of identity-centering in §2. They find  $G$ -membership

to be a highly salient feature of individuals who are members of *G*. They employ a stereotype for *G*s that guides how they classify and explain particular features and actions that individual members of *G* are observed to possess, as well as their expectations about what further properties they will possess; and that regulates their moral, emotional and aesthetic responses to *G*s in general and to individual *G*s. Finally, these different patterns of interpretation, explanation and response lead them to interact differently with people who are and are not members of *G*.

This pattern of thought and action is most likely to be generated by a frame that is rigid, universally applied, and fully endorsed. The most obvious cases are committed bigots' regular use of a slur *S* in marked contrast to a (more) neutral counterpart term (Camp 2013; cf. also Jeshion 2013, Neufeld 2019). Such a bigot believes that *S* is the most appropriate term for referring to members of *G* across the board, because it expresses a stereotype that captures the 'essence' of *G*s. That is, they employ the slur because it imputes a categorial ground *G* that naturally disposes members of *G* to possess a rich range of properties and behave in certain ways. Because they take *S*'s associated stereotype to have this metaphysical basis, they also take it to establish a certain warranted social status for members of *G* and to justify social structures enforcing this 'place'. Further, they take the stereotype to warrant distinct practical, moral, emotional, and aesthetic responses to features possessed by individual *G*s depending on whether they conform to the stereotype, as well as to warrant different responses to the same feature when it is possessed by members and non-members of *G*. In its clearest incarnation, the bigot hurls the slur as a weapon at a target member of *G*, shouting "You *S*!" or "You're nothing but an *S*!" in order to enforce that target's conformity to *S*-stereotypical properties and roles.

While this is the clearest case of frame-supported identity-centric thought and action, not all identity-centric frames fit this model. On the one hand, not all uses of slurs exemplify this pattern (Camp 2013): some slurs (e.g. 'midget') lack robust culture-wide stereotypes; some (e.g. 'libtard', 'snowflake') aren't culturally associated with a robust natural basis; and some slur-users don't exhibit particularly strong normative and emotional responses toward members of *G*, instead employing the slur casually in expressions of (putative) affection and praise. Second, not all frames are linguistic: pictures, flags, and other symbols are among our most powerful framing devices. Third, not all frames perform their framing function as a matter of convention: (live) metaphors are non-conventional by definition, and in principle, any representation can be pressed into service to express and regulate perspectives within a given community, agent, or context.

More importantly for current purposes, the same frame—that is, the same representational device used to express and regulate the same interpretive perspective—can vary significantly in how it operates in the minds of the agents who employ it, in ways that explain differences in the patterns of thought and behavior displayed by those agents. First, an agent may or may not *endorse* the frame at a reflective level. While the committed bigot believes members of *G* 'just are' the way the stereotype purports them to be, his targets and their allies may actively reject the stereotype. Even so, once it has been injected into the context it lingers as a "threat in the air" (Steele 1997), affecting their own interpretation and action in systematic ways that are difficult to combat, or sometimes even to notice. In many other cases, we may be unsure whether we truly endorse or reject a frame's perspective. Perspectives are open-ended and amorphous tools for thought; as such, they cannot be translated into specific, stable contents that are amenable to assessment for truth, rightness, or to-be-doneness. Moreover, we often take frames to be insightful or apt in some ways and for some purposes while also recognizing that it embodies priorities and assumptions we are unsure or uneasy about.

Second, a frame's deployment can vary in how *thickly* its cognitive effects extend beyond those associated with the characteristic function of belief, such as inference and intention-generation. Non-propositional frames like pictures, flags and movies are especially prone to affect perception and emotion in intuitive ways even in the absence of reflective endorsement.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while a framing term like "Oriental" might tend to produce comparatively intellectualistic identity-centric thought and action toward Asians, where this includes richly descriptive stereotypes and deliberative patterned behavior, a *Sports Illustrated* photograph of a swimsuit model is more likely to make stereotype-conforming and -violating features pop out in perception and recall, and to generate visceral emotional and aesthetic responses. Further, the same frame, such as "Oriental" or "queer", can have thinner or thicker non-cognitive effects for different agents.

Third, identity-centric frames vary in their *inferential centrality*, by explaining a wider or narrower range of features of individual members of the relevant group. At the high end, for example, an agent who employs the frame "Motherhood is the most important job in the world" whenever they think about and interact with women who have children will take the fact that someone is a mother to explain many of their personality traits, concerns, preferences, and behavior, and will extrapolate to many unobserved frame-conforming features. By contrast, an agent who is employed by the school district to organize outreach for alternative transportation services might find it highly salient whether a person is a woman with children, but not impute a wide set of shared features on that basis.

Fourth, identity-centric frames vary in their *norm centrality*. Thus, a woman wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with "This mom runs on coffee, wine and Amazon Prime" is likely to embrace a demanding set of prescriptions encompassing many aspects of a woman's life, to lionize mothers who successfully fulfill those demands, to sympathize with mothers who struggle while more or less achieving frame-relevant goals like hosting themed children's birthday parties, to denigrate mothers who reject those prescriptions, and to simply fail to 'get' women who aren't mothers. By contrast, the school district liaison might not just notice whether someone is a mother, but also intuitively expect those people to share a certain further properties based on her working knowledge of the district's demographics, without evaluating them normatively for their conformity to the frame.

Fifth, frames vary in their *cross-contextual application*. Some agents employ a given frame pervasively, whenever it is even moderately relevant. Thus, a social conservative might employ the slogan "Motherhood is the most important job in the world" as their touchstone for thinking about individual women, women in general, and the best way to organize society's social, material, and capital structures. Alternatively, an agent might also have a long-buried competence with a frame which is activated only when they are directly confronted with a tokening of the framing representation. For instance, someone born and raised the South who has been living in Paris and has not seen a Confederate flag in many years might .

Finally, frames vary in their *evidence-resistance*, in the sense of an agent's perseverance in employing it despite evidence of its being a poor fit for the current context. For example, consider someone whose primary frame for gay men is an image of a flamboyant twink. Upon finding out that their neighbor is gay, this frame comes to govern their thinking about the neighbor. If, upon meeting the neighbor and finding that he is in fact a shy, bookish parent-of-two, our hypothetical agent "can't

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<sup>4</sup> The phenomenological nature of pictorial representations has been used to motivate imagistic, as opposed to propositional, accounts of the imagination; see Kind (2001).

help but think” that the neighbor must love *Glee* and have watched it many times, then that frame is highly evidence-resistant for them. Conversely, an agent might be able to navigate flexibly and fluidly among multiple frames for women, or for gay men, as they interact more with individual members of those groups, and to construct new, tailor-made frames on that basis.

These six dimensions of variation—endorsement, non-cognitive thickness, inferential centrality, norm centrality, cross-contextual application, and evidence-resistance—are separable. An agent's deployment of a frame can score high on some and low on others, producing a wide array of identity-centric thought and action, where these variations can be traced to variations in the way that a frame employed. At one extreme, we have highly intellectualist, inferential- and norm- centralizing frames which an agent reflectively endorses and deploys across a wide range of contexts. Perhaps Phyllis Schlafly, or someone working at a right-wing think tank writing whitesheets on family leave policies, might employ the category of “mother” in this way. At the other end, we have imagistic frames that an agent entertains fleetingly and resistingly, and whose effects are primarily visceral and aesthetic: perhaps, a committed body positive feminist who encounters a barrage of Calzedonia swimsuit ads in the Paris metro and then feels a flash of repugnance looking down at her own ankles.

Finally, at the limit, there are cases of identity-centric thought and action which lack corresponding frames. Recall from §3.1 that frames function to crystallize perspectives, which are themselves open-ended dispositions to interpret a target domain in certain ways. Frames facilitate identity-centric thought and action by providing stable access to a perspective which renders a social identity highly salient and explanatory, and often normatively and affectively significant. Insofar as frames are socially shareable, they facilitate the transmission and perpetuation of socially-shared patterns of thought and action about social identities. Given how pervasive such shared patterns of thought and action are in constructing and enforcing the identity of marginalized social groups, we should expect that most thought and action which centers such identities will be explained by culturally dominant identity-centric frames.

However, not all perspectives have correlative frames. Some perspectives are just too complex and contextually enmeshed to be encapsulated in a pithy slogan or image; this is one reason we turn to fiction and other extended forms of art. Some perspectives await a great articulator who can find or make the *mot juste* to express them. But even perspectives that can be crystallized by a frame may not be accessed through a frame for a given agent: they may simply have the relevant cluster of dispositions, without any interpersonal or intrapersonal reflection or articulation.

In particular, an agent may have an identity-centric perspective on a social group, in the sense of being disposed to notice, respond, and evaluate in distinctive ways that in fact center a certain social category, without deploying an explicit frame that one recognizes as anchoring or regulating those dispositions. For example, in order to have a racist perspective, it suffices to be disposed to notice skin tone and other perceptible racialized features, to expect individuals to possess certain further properties on the basis of those features, and to feel unease or discomfort around people of a certain race or races. In our society, given the entrenched ubiquity of explicit racist ideology and institutions, we should expect that most people who have such a perspective to also employ racist frames, even if they fail to recognize when and how they are doing so, and even if they feel shame and repugnance when they are brought to recognize it. In such a case, we would expect that agent's reflective thoughts to be less explicitly racist, and the resulting behavior to be less stable across contexts, than those of a committed, slur-using bigot.

## 4. Frames, Beliefs, and Theories

In §3, we argued that the Frame View provides a rich and distinctive set of resources for explaining the wide diversity of patterns of identity-centric thought and action in coherent, unified terms. Throughout, we emphasized that frames cannot simply be reduced to beliefs. At the same time, beliefs about social groups abound, and clearly play a significant role in producing and maintaining social hierarchies. In this section, we address the relationship between frames and beliefs in the context of identity-centric thought and action. In §4.1, we argue that identitarian beliefs and theories emerge out of identity-centric perspectives and frames and play an important ideological, or justificatory, role in perpetuating identity-centric thought and action. In §4.2, we discuss the upshots of these conclusions for cognitive and social amelioration.

### 4.1. The Emergence of Essentialist Beliefs and Theories

We have argued that identity-centric thought and action is typically the result of regulating our thinking in identity-centric ways through the employment of frames, where this does not require correlative beliefs about the relevant social groups. However, people often do have such beliefs, at least given a standard construal of ‘belief’. In particular, psychologists and social theorists have often imputed *essentialist* beliefs—beliefs that “that members of categories share a fundamental nature that grounds a range of common properties” (Leslie 2014, p. 211)—to ordinary people, and have argued that these beliefs play an important role in explaining discrimination and bigotry. As Gordon Allport (1954, 174) famously put it, the view is that prejudice arises once “...a belief in essence develops. There is an inherent ‘Jewishness’ in every Jew. The ‘soul of the Oriental,’ ‘Negro blood,’ ... ‘the passionate Latin’—all represent a belief in essence. A mysterious mana (for good or ill) resides in a group, all of its members partaking thereof.”

According to the Frame View, prejudicial thought and discriminatory action can and often do arise in the absence of such beliefs, merely in virtue of employing identity-centric perspectives. Rather than stretching the scope of ‘belief’ to explain these cases, we do better to retain a more standard functional analysis of belief as an evidence-responsive attitude of endorsing a proposition (**ref to Carolina**), and to explain the wide range of identity-centric cognition and behavior by appeal to the more ecumenical theoretical resources of frames. Indeed, appealing to both beliefs and frames puts us in a better position to explain the distinctive patterns of thought and action that are generated when agents do have essentialist beliefs. In this subsection, we argue that essentialist beliefs emerge from the less intellectualist resources of frames and perspectives: perspectives generate beliefs by “gilding and staining all [social] objects with the colors” of one’s perspectival lenses (Hume [1751] 1983: 88). We then argue that such beliefs play a primarily justificatory rather than causal role in the regulation of identity-centric thought and behavior.

Let us begin at the most inchoate, least stable and intellectual end of cognition. As we saw in §3.2, one can behave in identity-centric ways in the absence of a correlative identity-centric belief or even frame, either by activating an identity-centric frame one doesn’t endorse, or by employing a frameless identity-centering perspective. However, this raises the question: how can such perspectives arise in the absence of corresponding representational anchors?

Here we take a page from intergroup theory, which studies the transformation of arbitrary intergroup divisions into ossified, rigid hierarchies (see Sidanius and Pratto 2001 for an overview).

Experimental evidence from this line of investigation illustrates how easy it is to produce identity-centric perspectives, just by classifying people in terms of trivial features. For instance, when elementary school children are split into groups based on the color of their t-shirt and that classification plays some practical role, the children attend more to differences between groups, take those not in their group to be significantly different, and evaluate their own group more positively and the other group more negatively, as compared to a control group (Bigler et al. 1997). For sufficiently young children, it is plausible that they classify, evaluate, and respond in these ways in the absence of any accompanying metaphysical beliefs about the groups, and without explicitly representing the groups as deeply different. Generalizing, identity-centric perspectives can arise from intergroup divisions without necessarily attributing robust, causally efficacious properties to the relevant groups.

However, even for (initially) arbitrary groups, perspectives that regularly center group membership tend to become crystallized through frames. As discussed in §3.1, frames serve as handy handles for storing, accessing and sharing perspectives, both intrapersonally across contexts and interpersonally within contexts. Because frames in general facilitate social coordination on a common perspective, which in turn smooths coordination in communication and action, and because perspectives centering social identities are especially likely to play a role in social coordination, identity-centric perspectives are especially likely to crystallize into frames.

Once such frames are available, they easily ossify along the dimensions discussed in §3.2. First, frequent use of a frame inculcates cognitive habits, which are only partly under voluntary control, and which become harder to dislodge the more they are exercised. Second, when a frame's deployment leads to practical success, this may appear to the agent who uses it as evidence that it is inferentially and metaphysically warranted, and thereby encourage them to project its applicability across an ever wider range of situations and properties.

Finally, our general desire for a world that coheres in a meaningful, comprehensible, and justifiable way can lead us to impute deeper justificatory and normative connections between a frame's perspective and the individuals and events to which we apply it than is warranted by the evidence we actually possess. Among other things, we are prone to impute causal connections on the basis of mere correlation, to overestimate correlations, and to impute moral principles in order to justify intuitive feelings of disgust (Haidt and Joseph 2004).

Our general desire for coherence can also lead us to treat highly prominent features as highly central. With respect to identity-centric thought, for instance, it can lead us to treat a superficial feature like skin color as diagnostic of an explanatorily powerful essence, or "a fundamental nature that grounds a range of common properties" (Leslie 2014, p. 211; Haslam et al 2000, Gelman 2005). More specifically, essentialist beliefs appear to be generated at least in part through an *inherence heuristic*: "an intuitive tendency to explain patterns in terms of the inherent properties of their constituents," (Salomon and Cimpian 2014, p. 1297). For example, we tend to explain patterns of inequality between social groups in terms of stable, enduring features of members of those groups as opposed to more extrinsic factors, such as historical causes. Reliance on the inherence heuristic also predicts endorsement of essentialist beliefs, and reducing reliance on the inherence heuristic reduces essentialist thinking (Salomon and Cimpian 2014).

Third, when practical success is achieved by employing frames to secure perspectival coordination between distinct agents, the form of unarticulated conversational presuppositions or smooth interpersonal interaction, this can reinforce the impression that the perspective must reflect

underlying phenomena that are really ‘out there’, independent of any particular agent’s assumptions (Camp 2008). Moreover, because only the relatively stable aspects of a perspective can be applied consistently across contexts and agents, repeated reliance on a frame tends to reduce its interpretive nuance and flexibility. This process of ossification is exacerbated to the extent that frames are deployed by a wide range of agents to coordinate on a wide range of interactions, as is frequently the case for social identities.

In this way, repeated application of a frame tends to be cognitively self-reinforcing, both individually and collectively. Because any frame imposes a coherent focal principle on a complex domain, it blinds us to features that don’t fit that principle, leading us to selectively collect confirming evidence while ignoring counterevidence. Similarly, its distinctive explanatory patterns of explanation help explain away any counterevidence that is recognized. In many ways, such self-reinforcing interpretive and causal loops can be cognitively and practically beneficial; indeed, they are arguably essential for limited cognitive agents like us (Camp 2019). But this reinforcement can also be limiting and distorting, in ways that are difficult or impossible to perceive from the inside (Camp forthcoming). Moreover, even bracketing interpretive and evidential limitations, the practical utility of interpersonal perspectival coordination can pressure members of the target group to interpret themselves, and to behave, in ways that conform to that perspective, in a causally efficacious “looping effect” (Hacking 1995).

All of this suggests that essentialist beliefs typically arise as a consequence of perspectival aspects of cognition, rather than the reverse. We are powerfully motivated to move from detecting patterns to ascribing inherent properties which explain them, and thence on to essentialist beliefs about kinds that generate and unite those properties, through something like the following schematic sequence:

1. Identity-centric **perspective** regulates thought and action about a social group.
2. Crystallization of this identity-centric perspective into a **frame**.
3. **Ossification** of this identity-centric frame into a highly stable, relatively simple principle for regulating attention, explanation and response across a wide range of otherwise disparate contexts.
4. Production via inherence heuristic of **essentialist beliefs** that don’t merely regulate cognition and behavior, but are taken to represent members of the social kind as they really are.
5. Construction of an explicit, reflectively endorsed **essentialist theory** about that social group.

In moving through this sequence, it’s not merely that perspectives transform over time into theories. Rather, each step of this process adds additional functional structures—frames, then beliefs, and finally theories—each of which renders the initial perspective more stable, more internally well-confirmed, and more resistant to counterevidence.

In societies like our own, essentialist or quasi-essentialist theories about social kinds abound, and are widely articulated and transmitted. Thus, most people are at least familiar with such theories, often deeply so. But as we saw in §3, being acquainted with or even endorsing such a theory does not suffice for identity-centric thought and action: one must also internalize the assumptions it embodies so that it guides one’s ongoing, intuitive interpretations and interactions. For this reason, perspectives continue to play a central explanatory role even in agents who explicitly endorse essentialist theories.



Rather than being the root of identity-centric thought and action, essentialist theories serve a primarily *justificatory* role for such patterns of behavior. Armed with such theories, we can justify centering social identities in our thought and action by arguing that these patterns of thought and action reflect the nature of our social world: that’s “just the way things are,” however much we might wish it were otherwise. In this way, essentialist theories contribute an additional layer of blindness and inaptness to the myopia we bring to many of our patterns of engagement with the world.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.2. Theory Change and Frame Shifts: Prospects for Amelioration

We have argued that identity-centric frames and perspectives provide a unified explanation of identity-centric thought and action. Given how pernicious such thought and action can be, however, one might well retort that we should be much more concerned with intervening effectively to change this behavior, rather than just to understand it. In this section, we argue that the Frame View offers a helpful theoretical basis on which to address this more practical question.

First, the Frame View gives us reason to be suspicious of a range of dominant approaches to changing or eliminating identity-centric thought and action. On the Frame View, interventions that focus solely on changing beliefs, without considering the interpretive resources people are liable to employ, appear blinkered. Insofar as beliefs are not the only or even primary mechanism through which we interface intuitively with the world, identity-centric thought and action are liable to persist, including especially in its affective and behavioral manifestations, even once essentialist beliefs are eliminated. Rather, targeting identity-centric thought and action requires shifting frames.

This point gains bite when we consider interventions such as theory critique and conceptual engineering. Theory critique focuses on exposing flawed arguments, or false assumptions, behind dominant theories of social groups and oppression.<sup>6</sup> For example, feminist theorists have argued against essentialist theories of gender, on which women form a unified kind instantiating a substantive property that all and only women share, and in particular against the view that gender is a biological property or that there are innate psychological differences between men and women (e.g. De Beauvoir 1952, Grillo 1995, Haslanger 2000, Spelman 1998, Witt 1995). Similar projects have also been undertaken concerning race (e.g. Appiah 1994, Mallon 2004, Shelby 2003, Zack 2014).

Such projects are indeed crucial for achieving a more accurate understanding of gender, race, and other social categories. However, they ought not to occupy center stage in attempting to change minds as a way of getting people to stop behaving in sexist or racist ways. Rejecting such theories at a conscious, deliberative level does not imply a fundamental shift in one’s operative frames for gendered

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<sup>5</sup> This echoes *systems justification* (Jost & Banaji 1994, Jost et al. 2004, Jost & Hunyady 2003, Yzerbit 1997) and *ideological* (Althusser 1970/2006, Eagleton 2014, Marx & Engels 1846/1970, Shelby 2003) views of essentialist beliefs, where such beliefs function to justify unjust social hierarchies. On a broader conception of ideology encompassing anything that “functions to stabilize or perpetuate unjust power and domination, and does so through some form of masking or illusion” (Haslanger 2017, p. 150), and not only beliefs or justificatory tools, pernicious identity-centric perspectives and frames will also count as components of ideology.

<sup>6</sup> This criticism only applies to theorists who think of ideologies as sets of propositions or beliefs. Denying that claim allows for a view of ideology critique as involving “reorganization of our society around different values, a restructuring of our practices so that we are positioned to recognize the value of new or different kinds of thing and coordinate on just terms” (Haslanger 2017, p. 169). One can view shifting perspectives as an individual-level implementation of this proposal.

interactions. Indeed, in the absence of shifting frames and perspectives, theory critique is likely to produce resistant counter-theory-building, in order to justify one's intuitive, gut perspective (**dig up empirical ref**).

Conceptual engineering is likely to be similarly ineffective. A central task of conceptual engineering involves proposing new extension-determining representations to attach to politically significant terms (Burgess and Plunkett 2013a, 2013b). Perhaps the most influential example is Sally Haslanger's (2000) proposal that we should, for social and political purposes, employ the term 'woman' such that "S is a woman iff S is systematically subordinated along some dimension, and S is 'marked' as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction" (p. 39).

If the Frame View is right, we should be on the lookout in the first instance for bad *characterizations* of social kinds, as generated by inapt pernicious frames, and only secondarily for bad *concepts*. Someone's reflective concept of woman could be maximally politically savvy, in grouping the right group of people under the label "woman" and in endorsing inferences from group membership to important facts about our unjust operative social structure, even as one is also systematically disposed to characterize women in sexist ways. Conceptual engineering, much like theory building, is useful for theoretical inquiry on the social domain, and possibly also for constructing novel options for alternative frames. But on its own, it is unlikely to produce deep changes in identity-centric behavior.

Rather than focusing primarily on intellectualist interventions like theory critique and conceptual engineering, we should directly target perspectives, by means of frames. The goal is to produce perspectival shifts: to get people to actually and persistently notice different sets of features, to be disposed to explain the social world in different patterns, and especially to alter their normative evaluations and affective responses of members of marginalized social groups.

Frames are at the root of much dangerous perspectival cognition, and thereby in particular of much pernicious identity-centric behavior. But for these very same reasons, they are also our best allies in the project of amelioration. Because frames crystallize perspectives into portable packages that can be easily distributed and employed to express perspectives across contexts, they can function as touchstones for reorienting one's whole mode of engagement with a topic, integrating perception, explanation, evaluation and affect.

Examples of positive frames include narratives that center members of marginalized groups; depictions of famous members; photographs, symbols, and other visual media; memes; and slogans.<sup>7</sup> Of course, this is not a novel point: it is reflected in calls for better representation of members of marginalized groups in mainstream media, in the value placed on role models from such groups, and in the development of now-ubiquitous frames combating bigotry, such as the "Black Lives Matter" slogan and Pride flag. (**criticism of Jason Stanley on propaganda?**)

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<sup>7</sup> Highlighting counter-stereotypical kind members is only likely to be effective where the group is already perceived as encompassing trait variability, or where many different exemplars with a range of counter-stereotypical traits are presented. When these conditions are not met, subjects are likely to create a sub-type and maintain the same stereotype for the broader group. See Johnston & Hewstone 1992, Hewstone et al. 1994, Hewstone & Hamberger 2000, Richards & Hewstone 2001 for more on sub-typing and stereotype resilience. Additionally, where other available information allows to explain away the variation, subjects tend to maintain the stereotype for the broader group and create a new sub-type which does not conform to the broader stereotype (Kunda & Oleson 1995).

What makes for a politically good frame is highly context-sensitive, even given a fixed set of political values and goals. Different people begin from different perspectives and have different degrees of perspectival flexibility, affecting what kinds of frames they are likely to be responsive to, and which will lead them to retrench.

A minimal constraint on good frames is that they be epistemically apt, in the sense of reliably generating characterizations that are accurate at least in relevant respects (Camp 2019). For example, good frames on gender produce characterizations of women as a group, and of individual women, which embody assignments of prominence that accurately reflect actual statistical distributions of ascribed properties, assignments of centrality that connect those properties on the basis of actually causally efficacious grounds and accurately capture the counterfactual dependency of those properties on social circumstances, and assignments of normative evaluation which align with these statistical distributions and causal grounds.

However, epistemic aptness does not suffice to render a frame politically effective: they must also be intuitively appealing—catchy, touching, funny, or relatable. Given that coming to inhabit a new perspective requires shifts in deep-seated habits of interpretation, and given that identity-centric perspectives are aligned with deep-seated social hierarchies, which afford powerful, ubiquitous but often subtle privileges to members of dominant groups, ameliorative frames need to generate rather than shut down engagement and dialogue. As we noted in §3, frames can be effective even when they are not believed to be or even presented as being literally true, but just by being funny, ironic, or otherwise apt. Frames can also be epistemically apt even if literally false. However, in contexts of contested political discourse, literal truth is often an important virtue, by depriving antagonists of opportunities for willful misinterpretation and criticism.

Simply producing new alternative frames for social identities is not enough to shift identity-centric thought and action. We also need to circulate those frames, and help others work their way into a full, intuitive appreciation of their perspectives. We need to loosen the grip of old pernicious frames, through critique (including sometimes humor and mockery). And we need to motivate people to move from merely achieving more perceptive interpretation to taking forceful, often risky action on material and cultural reality. Ultimately, this must be a systemic effort.<sup>8</sup> Still, we can take steps to change our own perspectives and those of others around us, to bring them into closer alignment with what we reflectively believe to be true. Among other things, we can question the relevance of appeals to group membership in explaining individual people's actions; we can avoid accentuating differences between categories (Prentice and Miller 2007); we can highlight counter-stereotypical features of members of marginalized groups; and we can point out both non-obvious similarities between people from different social groups and non-obvious differences between people in the same social group (Gelman 2005).

Finally, although our point here has been that argumentation without concern for intuitive perspectival interpretation is unlikely to be effective, and we have emphasized that frames operate on different and more ecumenical grounds than belief, framing and argumentative theorizing should be deeply intertwined. If we are only concerned about shifting perspectives, we risk eroding important epistemic values. We need ultimately to offer factual and normative justifications for concrete policies, structural changes, and perspectival changes. Theories and arguments, not frames, are the tools for performing such justificatory work. At the same time, even when such theories are on the table, we still

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<sup>8</sup> See Haslanger 2017 for more on cultural change, which is largely a matter of changing dominant perspectives.

need to habituate to the way of seeing things that the theory supports; and we need to probe and refine those theories, in ways that frames and perspectives are ideally suited to help accomplish (Camp 2020).

The overall picture that emerges from the Frame View is one which makes space for rational argument, on a more capacious and warm-blooded view of rationality and argumentation than philosophers have traditionally employed. Effective rational argument does not target isolated beliefs in specific propositions. Instead, it advocates for accurate and fruitful taxonomies for parsing the world and allocating attention, for empirically well-grounded explanations, and for normatively justified emotional and practical responses. Frames are an important tool for both inquiry and advocacy.

## 5. Conclusion

We often center social identities in ways that are reductive, inapt, and contribute to discriminatory behavior. In this paper, we investigated the psychological basis for thought and action that centers social identities. We argued that identity-centric thought and action are the result of regulating attention and interpretation in ways that center an identity category. Because attention and interpretation can be driven by a wide range of representations, identity-centric thought and action cannot be understood, or addressed, by focusing solely on what an agent believes. By contrast, an account in terms of frames and perspectives can explain the full range of cases in unified terms while capturing important dimensions of variation, and yields a range of concrete suggestions for how to target and address such thought and action.<sup>9</sup>

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